



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
09/915,936	07/25/2001	Kouji Kurosaki	IIW-006	8248
959	7590	10/07/2005	EXAMINER	
LAHIVE & COCKFIELD, LLP. 28 STATE STREET BOSTON, MA 02109			TSANG FOSTER, SUSY N	
			ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
			1745	
DATE MAILED: 10/07/2005				

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/915,936

Applicant(s)

KUROSAKI ET AL.

Examiner

Susy N. Tsang-Foster

Art Unit

1745

-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 07 March 2005 and 24 June 2005.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-3, 5-8 and 10-14 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-3 and 5-8 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☒ Claim(s) 10-14 is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
- Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
- Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
- ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 - ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 - ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☐ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☒ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08)
- Paper No(s)/Mail Date 20050131

- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
- Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)
- 6) ☐ Other: _____

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on 3/7/2005 and 6/24/2005 have been entered.

Information Disclosure Statement

2. The information disclosure statement (IDS) submitted on 1/31/2005 has been considered by the examiner.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112

3. The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.

4. Claim 6 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.

Claim 6 is indefinite because it depends on cancelled claim 4.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

5. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

6. Claims 1-3, 5, 7, and 8 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Merritt et al. (US 5,366,821).

In general, Merritt et al. disclose a method and apparatus for providing a substantially constant output voltage from a fuel cell notwithstanding output current variations (see abstract). The reference is concerned with providing a substantially constant voltage even when its load current varies (col. 4, lines 48-51) and optimizing the oxygen utilization ratio according to the transient power output of the fuel cell to improve efficiency (col. 3, lines 59-65).

Merritt et al. disclose a fuel cell system (see Figure 2) that comprises a fuel cell 10, which generates power to a variable load 152 by supplying anode gas 112, cathode gas 162 (air) into the fuel cell and a compressor 330 (see Figure 3) that controls the amount of air to be supplied into the cathode side of the fuel cell and a pressure control valve 180 (see Figure 4) *that controls* the air pressure of the fuel cell and which is provided on downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell (see abstract; col. 8, lines 38-44; col. 9, line 24 to col. 10, line 27; col. 11, line 32 to col. 12, line 45). The air flow controls means in the form of a flow calculator (see Figure 4) controls the airflow toward the cathode inlet side to be a target airflow amount corresponding to the target power generation amount (the required pressure) of the fuel cell by controlling the speed of the

Art Unit: 1745

compressor which controls the revolution number of the motor that drives the speed of the compressor (col. 9, lines 24-46; col. 11, lines 46-67 and col. 12, lines 1-44).

If the flow rate of the oxidant is to be increased during the transition period of the fuel cell, the desired mass flow rate is implemented and maintained by changing the size of the flow control valve 180 until the flow calculator 349 (the air pressure control means) determined that the desired mass flow has been achieved and any subsequent deviation from the desired mass flow rate is similarly detected at the mass flow transducer 358 and remedied by the flow calculator 340 through the command signal 389 to the flow control valve 180 (col. 10, lines 20-27). During the stationary state of the fuel cell, the mass flow rate of the reactant gas is regulated by the flow control valve 180 at the cathode gas output of the fuel cell and the flow calculator, which is responsive primarily to the fuel cell output current and secondarily to the mass flow rate measured at the cathode gas input, actuates the flow control valve 180 (col. 5, lines 60-68).

During a transition period of the fuel cell such as when the output current of the fuel cell has changed, the flow rate of the oxidant gas can be increased without decreasing its pressure and the variable-flow control valve 180 is opened until the transducer 358 detects that the desired mass flow rate has been obtained and since an uncompensated increase in the mass flow rate would be accompanied by a pressure drop, any resulting tendency toward a pressure drop will be met by increasing the speed of the motor 332 sufficiently to restore the set point pressure of the oxidant gas supply which changes the amount of air supplied by the compressor during the transition period (col. 12, lines 1-25). As can be seen in this section of the reference, changing the opening of the valve during the transition period changes the pressure of the oxidant gas

Art Unit: 1745

stream as well as the flow rate of the oxidant gas stream through the fuel cell. The speed or the revolution number of the compressor also inherently controls the amount of airflow into the cathode inlet side of the fuel cell because it pumps the air from an air source or supply into the cathode inlet side of the fuel cell.

After the motor 332 to the compressor is adjusted, the mass flow rate is again changed slightly as monitored by sensor 358 and the valve 180 is adjusted to restore the flow rate through the transducer 344 (col. 12, lines 25-28). Column 12, lines 25-28 of the reference clearly disclose changing the amount of cathode gas supplied to the fuel cell by the compressor during the transition period and thereafter changing the opening of the pressure control valve 180. A change in the motor speed operating the air compressor changes the air flow rate, which is also the mechanism by which pressure is changed (col. 9, lines 44-55). When the opening of the control valve 180 is adjusted to compensate for the changes of the amount of cathode gas due to the adjustment of air flow made by the compressor, the pressure is restored to the original pressure (the target pressure).

Hence it can be seen during the transition period of the fuel cell, the feedback steps of maintaining the flow amount of air to a prescribed value and a pressure of the air to a prescribed value are stopped while the system is being configured such that successive perturbations of the pressure control and mass flow control will be smaller and smaller (air pressure control means during the transition period is kept operating until the airflow amount reaches the target value and the air pressure control means during the transition period is kept operating until the airflow amount reaches the target air flow amount) and a new state of operation (the stationary state with

Art Unit: 1745

no load current variation) at the new mass flow rate and the original pressure (the target pressure) will be quickly achieved after the transition state is over (col. 12, lines 29-33).

Finally, as seen in Figure 1 of applicant's present specification, the flow valve 8A is located downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and the compressor 7B is located upstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell. The flow valve 180 of Merritt is similarly located downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and the compressor 330 is located upstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and both the flow valve 180 and compressor 330 inherently control the pressure and flow rate of the oxidant gas through the fuel cell as recited in the instant claims because the location of the flow valve 180 is identical to the location of the flow valve 8A shown in Figure 1 of the present specification and the location of the compressor is identical to the location of the compressor 7B shown in Figure 1 of the present specification. Although the semantics of the Merritt et al. reference may be slightly differently from that claimed in the instant claims, the processes claimed are inherently disclosed by the fuel cell system of Merritt et al. when Figures 1-4 of Merritt are compared to Figure 1 of the present application as to the location of the flow valve downstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell and the location of the compressor upstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell.

The amount of power generated from the fuel cell is changed during the transition period as the gas flow amount to the cathode is gradually adjusted to the target value discussed above that is maintained during the new stationary state such that the power is not changed.

Merritt also clearly discloses controlling the amount of cathode gas (air) supplied by a compressor during a transition period of the fuel cell due to current load variations that require more or less oxygen in the fuel cell and corresponding more or less output power which is

Art Unit: 1745

directly related to the increase or decrease of the current of the electrical output of the fuel cell stack as measured by current transducer 362 (col. 10, lines 27-36). Even though the voltage is maintained to be substantially constant, the output current is not and therefore the output power is also varied due to variations in the current output. One of ordinary skill in the art is familiar with the power equation given by $P \text{ (power)} = V \text{ (voltage)} \times I \text{ (current)}$.

Furthermore Merritt states the required mass flow rate of the oxidant gas through the stack 10 and thus through the mass flow transducer 358 is determined by the flow calculator which is primarily responsive to the current signal of the current transducer (col. 10, lines 1-5). Merritt also states that both the compressor and the valve 180 are used to set the new mass flow rate and maintaining a pressure after the transition period is over (col. 12, lines 1-28).

Moreover, Merritt states that increasing the mass flow rate by using valve 180 causes a pressure drop if the increase in the mass flow rate is not compensated (col. 12, lines 13-21). The pressure is compensated by adjusting the air flow supplied by the compressor which also inherently changes the mass flow rate (col. 12, lines 21-26). Adjusting or controlling the variable valve 180 inherently adjusts the pressure as well as the mass flow rate of the oxidant through the fuel cell. As seen in Figure 1 of applicant's present specification, the flow valve 8A is located downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and the compressor 7B is located upstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell. The flow valve 180 of Merritt is similarly located downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and the compressor 330 is located upstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and both the flow valve 180 and compressor 330 inherently controls the pressure and flow rate of the oxidant gas through the fuel cell as recited in the instant claims because the

Art Unit: 1745

location of the flow valve 180 is identical to the location of the flow valve 8 A shown in Figure 1 of the present specification and the location of the compressor is identical to the location of the compressor 7B shown in Figure 1 of the present specification. Although the semantics of the Merritt et al. reference may be slightly differently from that claimed in the instant claims, the processes claimed are inherently disclosed by the fuel cell system of Merritt et al. when Figures 1-4 of Merritt are compared to Figure 1 of the present application as to the location of the flow valve downstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell and the location of the compressor upstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell.

Finally, as seen in Figure 5 of the instant application, the opening of the back pressure control valve is not done in one step after changing the air flow amount by the compressor. The opening of the back pressure control valve is coordinated with the change in the air flow amount provided by the compressor.

With respect to claim 2, Merritt discloses that alternatively, the pressure, mass flow rate and reactant utilization ratio of the reactant can be changed in response to changes in the output current of the fuel cell (col. 6, lines 35-40). The changes to the output current of the fuel cell reflects the change in the amount of power generated during the transition period since power of the fuel cell is given by $V \times I$. Thus, since the pressure and the mass flow rate changes during the transition period of the fuel cell, the pressure feedback control step which controls a pressure of the cathode gas to a prescribe value, and the flow amount feedback control step which controls a flow amount of a cathode gas supplied to a fuel cell are stopped during the transition period.

Response to Arguments

7. Applicant's arguments filed 3/7/2005 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

With respect to the Merritt reference, applicant asserts that the reference does not disclose that the amount of the cathode gas supplied to the fuel cell is first changed, and then the pressure of the cathode gas is subsequently regulated to reach a target gas pressure depending on the amount of the changed cathode gas (emphases added).

In response, applicant's argument is not commensurate in scope with the claims. For the purpose of responding to this argument, the Merritt reference discloses the flow rate of the oxidant is to be increased and this increase in flow rate would be accompanied by a pressure drop and the pressure drop is then restored (col. 12, lines 13-28).

As stated above, the flow valve 180 of Merritt is similarly located downstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and the compressor 330 is located upstream of the cathode side of the fuel cell and both the flow valve 180 and compressor 330 inherently controls the pressure and flow rate of the oxidant gas through the fuel cell as recited in the instant claims because the location of the flow valve 180 is identical to the location of the flow valve 8 A shown in Figure 1 of the present specification and the location of the compressor is identical to the location of the compressor 7B shown in Figure 1 of the present specification. Although the semantics of the Merritt et al. reference may be slightly differently from that claimed in the instant claims, the processes claimed are inherently disclosed by the fuel cell system of Merritt et al. when Figures 1-4 of Merritt are compared to Figure 1 of the present application as to the location of the flow

Art Unit: 1745

valve downstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell and the location of the compressor upstream of the oxidant side of the fuel cell.

With respect to Merritt, applicant also asserts that the Merritt reference fails to disclose that the feedback controls steps for controlling the flow amount and the pressure of the air are stopped in the transition period because column 12, lines 29-33 of the reference discloses "if the system is configured correctly, the successive perturbations of the pressure control and mass flow control will be smaller and smaller, and a new state of operation of the new mass flow rate and the original pressure will quickly be achieved."

This argument is moot in view of the new ground of rejection for claim 2 set forth above.

Allowable Subject Matter

8. Claims 10-14 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

9. The following is a statement of reasons for the indication of allowable subject matter: The closest prior art of record, Merritt does not disclose, teach or suggest the distinguishing feature of the opening of the pressure control valve for controlling the pressure of the cathode gas is decreased at an initial stage of the transition period and thereafter the opening of the pressure control valve is increased following an increase of the cathode gas flow amount.

Art Unit: 1745

Conclusion

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications should be directed to examiner Susy Tsang-Foster whose telephone number is (571) 272-1293. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday through Friday from 9:30 AM to 6:00 PM.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Patrick Ryan can be reached at (571) 272-1292.

The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is (571) 273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free).

st/

Susy Tsang-Foster

**SUSYTSANG-FOSTER
PRIMARY EXAMINER**